



# 2000 Session Review

*For the people of the  
15th Legislative District  
encompassing Yakima,  
Benton, Klickitat and  
Skamania counties.*



Rep. Bruce Chandler

Sen. Jim Honeyford

Rep. Barb Lisk

Spring 2000

Dear friends and neighbors,

Following a 60-day legislative session and one-month special session, lawmakers continue to work overtime on the state operating and transportation budgets. As of this printing, negotiations on compromise budgets are ongoing. While we would prefer to have finished our work on time, the important issues we are fighting for are worth the extra time and effort.

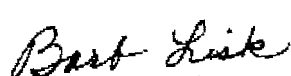
Major budget decisions had to be made following the approval of Initiative 695, the measure which cut our license tab taxes to \$30. Funding for local public safety, criminal justice and transportation (items previously paid for by the old motor vehicle excise tax) are hanging in the balance.

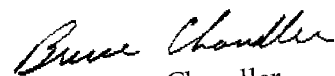
We believe we can address these important needs with responsible, long-term solutions using the money we have and without breaking the state spending limit. Senate Democrat budget writers have proposed an expensive short-term fix, which could lead us to potentially harmful budget cuts or tax increases in the future. We are working on a compromise that keeps us on a fiscally sound path and allows us to address local public safety needs both immediately and over the long term.

We would like to thank those of you who communicated with us during the past four months. It has been a challenging session, and input from individuals such as yourself was tremendously valuable. We continue to welcome your comments or questions regarding the issues addressed this session or other matters related to state government.

Sincerely,

  
Jim Honeyford  
State Senator

  
Barb Lisk  
State Representative

  
Bruce Chandler  
State Representative

## Keep in Touch

### Senator

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## Funding for local communities hinges on budget talks

Budget negotiations between the evenly divided House and the Democrat-controlled Senate have continued well beyond the 60-day regular session. Republicans and Democrats in the House, who share control with a 49-49 split, reached a ground-breaking agreement during the recent special session and approved a compromise budget with overwhelming bipartisan support. The bipartisan plan meets our priorities of providing meaningful ongoing funding for transportation and local public safety, including police, fire protection and criminal justice, all of which faced funding cuts in the wake of Initiative 695. We demonstrated that we could respond to the tax-cut initiative in a fiscally responsible manner while protecting services most important to citizens.

Democrat budget writers in the Senate, however, have rejected our proposal, insisting instead on an expensive short-term fix that places taxpayers at risk and fails to ensure sustainable funding in future budgets for important services. We remain hopeful the Legislature will take a visionary approach and address public safety and transportation needs on a long-term, fiscally responsible basis.

## Individual health insurance market bill signed into law

Purchasing individual health insurance policies in our state has been virtually impossible in the past year or two. Prior to the enactment of the 1993 Health Services Act, 19 insurance companies competed in Washington for the individual market. However, our state's current regulatory structure has forced nearly all major individual health carriers out of the state. Today there are only three, and none of them offers individual coverage to new enrollees in 32 of the state's 39 counties. Roughly 600,000 people in Washington have no health insurance, many of them in Eastern Washington.

With private health insurance in danger of becoming extinct, the Legislature committed itself to fixing the individual market this session.

The result is Senate Bill 6067, recently signed into law by the governor. This measure, which received strong bipartisan support in both the House and Senate, is a major victory for families. This bill:

- Provides credit on the waiting period if a person currently holds insurance and is following his or her doctor to a new plan, moving to a new area, or changing to a plan with equal or lesser benefits.
- Under individual comprehensive plans, maternity benefits and an annual \$2,000 worth of prescription drug benefits must be provided. Prenatal care has no waiting period. Delivery is subject to the nine-month waiting period.
- Enacts insurance reforms to bring more carriers back into the market and increase competition, which will reduce costs and increase choices for health care consumers.

## Other key health care legislation signed into law

The Legislature also approved a measure that gives patients greater choices and input. Under Senate Bill 6199:

- The privacy of a patient's health care records is protected.
- An independent review process will be created to review coverage denials, modifications or a reduction in a patient's benefits or costs.
- Carriers must fully disclose plan information, including benefits, cost, limitations and appeal processes.
- Carriers must provide an adequate number of choices so patients are able to choose doctors they trust.
- Patients can't be denied direct access to chiropractic care, access to a second opinion or timely referrals to a specialist.

## Transportation projects await funding

Funding for many local highway improvements is also on hold while lawmakers decide how to restore funding that was lost due to I-695 for transportation. We support an ongoing funding solution that would allow us to embark on a long-term transportation improvement plan for our state. Our local economy and our quality of life depend on our ability to maintain mobility and safety on our highways. A short-term funding fix will not get the job done.

We are supporting a budget that would fund the following projects:

### Highway 14:

- Goodnoe Road to Wood Creek
- Hood River Bridge to Willow St.
- Lyle Tunnel
- State Route 221 to milepost 175
- Rockfall stabilization along numerous points of the highway

### Highway 97:

- Briggs Rapid Bridge
- State Route 22 to Wapato Road
- Dry Creek Bridge to weigh station

### Highway 22:

- McDonald Road to SR 97
- Holt Road to Highland Drive
- Holt Road to milepost 8

The budget would also provide money for widening and improvements to Wine County Road near Prosser for improving freight mobility.



Rep. Barb Lisk serves as Co-Majority Leader for the House Republican Caucus.



### License tab fees to remain at \$30

Initiative 695, the measure approved by voters to reduce car tab fees to \$30, was ruled unconstitutional by a King County judge earlier this year. The judge said the measure violated the requirement that initiatives be limited to one subject. In addition to the tax cut, the measure would have required voter approval of any future state or local tax or fee increase.

Fortunately, lawmakers responded quickly to the ruling. Rather than wait for an appeal to the state Supreme Court, the Legislature assured the \$30 tab fee will be retained by passing legislation during the special session. The governor signed the measure into law.



force on water storage to examine the role of increased water storage in providing water supplies and flood control. This measure died in committee but was included in the budget. Task force findings must be reported to the Legislature by Dec. 31 of this year.

Another bill we thought might have a strong chance of passing, Senate Bill 6525, died on the last day of the regular session because of parliamentary action by Senate Democrats. This bill would have allowed the Department of Ecology to process applications for transfers of existing water rights separately from applications for new water rights. We were especially disappointed in the fate of this bill, and will continue to find a way to address the backlog of more than 2,000 transfer applications.

Other important water legislation that was introduced, but died:

- HB 2994 — Requires DOE to accept certain donations of water rights for the trust water right systems for instream flows in areas where aquatic species have been listed as endangered or threatened.
- HB 2735 — Clarifies “voluntary fails” for water right relinquishment purposes.

### Needs of junior water districts to be studied

Junior water-right holders in the Yakima project continue to face problems when the available water supply runs short. Farmers who are served by irrigation districts that hold junior water rights often don't receive their full water delivery late in the season. While a water shortage for any grower is critical, those who have high-value, perennial crops common to the Yakima Valley are especially hard-hit when we experience a water shortage.

This session we allotted \$300,000 for the Department of Ecology to conduct an analysis of the Roza Irrigation District for off-stream storage at Washout Canyon, due west of the Hanford Highway. The analysis would determine whether the canyon is a suitable location for a retention dam and water storage reservoir. The land in the proposed reservoir area and the canyon land downstream is in sagebrush, and has been operated as an open range for decades. It seems like a natural place for this kind of facility.

Additional water storage options would bring much-needed stability to the farmers, cattlemen and orchardists and other agriculture-related industries in the district whose livelihoods are at stake each spring and summer. We look forward to sharing DOE's findings with you soon.

Of course, this funding is dependent on passage of the budget.



### Other water issues

Although we worked hard on legislation that would address our water issues, only one major water bill survived the session. House Bill 2736 establishes a task



*Sen. Honeyford addresses a water issue during Senate floor debate.*

Fair and youth show funding

For years now, state fairs have been a window on our communities. In addition to providing annual entertainment and recreation for families of all ages, fairs and youth shows also provide important vocational training and work experiences for youth and adults.

Until recently, the state has made a substantial funding commitment to keep these shows alive. Unfortunately, there now isn't enough funding provided, and permanent state funding for Washington's 72 youth fairs and agricultural shows ends this year. Eight of the 72 are hosted right here in the 15th District.

To ensure the future of our state's fairs, lawmakers proposed a task force this year to study long-term funding sources for fairs. This proposal is included in the 1999-2001 supplemental budget that is still under negotiation.



Rep. Chandler testifies in front of a committee on behalf of legislation that he supports.

The task force would report its findings to the Legislature this fall and present a permanent funding plan for lawmakers to approve next session.

Washington's state fairs generate significant educational, social

and economic benefits to urban, suburban and rural communities alike. A permanent source of funding would ensure these local events will continue for generations to come.



15th Legislative District

